

WASHINGTON EARNINGS COMPARED TO THE U.S. AND OTHER WESTERN STATES: A REPORT BASED ON THE CENSUS

Research Brief No. 33B
March 2005

Change in Total Earnings: Washington vs. the U.S. and Other Western States

By Erica Gardner

Using data from the 1990 and 2000 five percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), change in total earnings were examined for Washington and U.S. residents aged 18 to 64 (regardless of their work status). Compared to the U.S. as a whole, mean earnings for Washington State started at a higher level in 1989 and grew at a faster rate between 1989 and 1999 (see Table 1). Between 1989 and 1999, the mean earnings for Washington State increased by 20 percent or \$4,759 dollars. The mean earnings for the U.S. as a whole increased by 18 percent or \$4,114 dollars.

According to the data on mean earnings, Washington residents appear to be doing better than the U.S. as a whole, but one gets a slightly different impression when one looks at the median earnings.¹ While Washington State's median earnings were higher in 1989 and 1999 than the median earnings for the U.S. as a whole, Washington's median earnings did not grow as fast or by as much. Between 1989 and 1999, the median earnings for Washington State increased 12 percent or by \$2,103 dollars compared the 16 percent increase or the \$2,574 dollars gained in median earnings for the U.S. as a whole.

Table 1: Change Total Earnings: United States vs. Washington State

	1989*	1999	Change 1999- 1989*	% Change (1999/ 1989*-1)
<i>mean earnings</i>				
United States	\$22,965	\$27,073	\$4,114	18%
Washington	\$23,532	\$28,291	\$4,759	20%
<i>median earnings</i>				
United States	\$16,481	\$19,000	\$2,574	16%
Washington	\$17,897	\$20,000	\$2,103	12%

* 1989 earnings shown in 1999 dollars

Washington vs. Other Western States

In both 1989 and 1999, mean earnings were highest in California, followed in order by Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Compared to California, Oregon, and Idaho, Washington had both the highest rate of increase in mean earnings between 1989 and 1999 as well as the greatest dollar gain (see Table 2). Oregon had the second highest rate of increase in mean earnings followed by Idaho and then by California.

The Washington State data used in this analysis come from the 1990 and the 2000 five percent Public Use Microdata Sample, (PUMS). More information on this survey can be found at the Census website:

<http://www.census.gov/main/www/pums.html>.

In 1989, Washington had the highest median earnings followed in order by California, Oregon, and Idaho. By 1999, the order changed a little with California and Oregon swapping places for second and third highest median earnings. Between 1989 and 1999, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho all experienced increases in median earnings, while California experienced a small decline. Idaho's median earnings increased 23 percent or \$3,060 dollars. In contrast, Washington's median earnings increased 12 percent or \$2,103 dollars.

Table 2: Change in Total Earnings: Washington State vs. Other Western States

	1989*	1999	Change 1999- 1989*	% Change (1999/ 1989*-1)
<i>mean earnings</i>				
Washington	\$23,532	\$28,291	\$4,759	20%
California	\$25,654	\$28,748	\$3,094	12%
Oregon	\$21,300	\$25,280	\$3,980	19%
Idaho	\$19,340	\$22,755	\$3,415	18%
<i>median earnings</i>				
Washington	\$17,897	\$20,000	\$2,103	12%
California	\$17,600	\$17,500	-\$100	-1%
Oregon	\$15,341	\$18,000	\$2,659	17%
Idaho	\$13,040	\$16,100	\$3,060	23%

* 1989 earnings shown in 1999 dollars

1. For more details on why mean earnings were greater than the median earnings see [Research Brief 26A: Total Earnings for All Adults Aged 18 to 64 in 1999](#)).

To obtain this publication in an alternative format, contact the
Washington State Office of Financial Management at (360) 902-0599